

Alison Cantor

March 2, 2020

In favor of HB-6374 Joint Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement

Senator Haskell, Representative Elliott, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee: My name is Alison Cantor and I am a student and resident of Fairfield, Connecticut. I am a constituent of Representative McCarthy Vahey and Senator Hwang. I will be testifying for House Bill 6374, An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct On College Campuses. It is imperative that we take this time to discuss sexual violence - an act that affects the lives of survivors, their friends, and families every single day.

Connecticut's universities and colleges do not have the proper data about sexual violence happening on their campuses, yet there are many survivors that want to share their experiences in order to make change. We know in Connecticut through the Clery Act that there were 436 reported cases of campus sexual violence, stalking and domestic violence in 2018 alone. However, this number does not come close to what is perceived to be the actual number of accounts of violence happening to students on college campuses because national statistics estimate that more than 90% of sexual assaults go unreported. For those who may not know, the Clery Act was established under the federal statute 20 U.S.C. § 1092. The Clery Center website describes this act as a consumer protection law that aims to provide transparency around campus crime policy and statistics.

Over this past summer, hundreds of students attending colleges in Connecticut took matters into their own hands by creating Instagram accounts for student survivors. The creators of these Instagram accounts provided a link to an online form in the bio of the accounts where students could anonymously share their stories of violence that were committed against them by other students. The creators then were able to take those stories and turn them into posts that were put on the Instagram accounts for their followers to see. Some of the accounts I saw were made for student survivors of Wesleyan University, Trinity College, University of Connecticut, and Connecticut College.

These Instagram accounts show that survivors at colleges in Connecticut want to share their experiences in order to seek immediate change from their colleges, but they need to have an anonymous platform to do so. Fortunately, genuine change has the potential to happen in the near future if House Bill 6374 were to be implemented. The proponent of the bill that would mandate that colleges in Connecticut administer a campus climate survey every two years would provide a consistent anonymous platform for survivors to share their experiences of sexual violence with administrators. The survey would provide a credible source of data that would help colleges and universities improve policies to prevent sexual violence and to provide better support for survivors.

The campus climate survey must be administered every two years in order to accurately capture what student bodies are experiencing. A two year frequency is more likely to capture the experiences of students obtaining a two-year associate's degree as well as transfer students, graduate students, those studying abroad, and those taking time off.

Thank you all for taking the time to hear why I support House Bill 6374. Members of the Higher Educational Committee, please vote this bill out of committee as soon as possible so we can get closer to ensuring the safety of all students attending institutions of higher learning in Connecticut.